

FAIR ENOUGH!

Mike Is a Lot of Man

BY WESTBROOK PEGLER

Recognition and fame have been a long time catching up with Michael Chinigo, one of the best and bravest American correspondents of the second war, but have tagged him at last in "Command Mission," the story of Lieut. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott Jr., a blunt, brash fellow whose attitude and style would be useful in the job of political essayist filing out of Washington.



For example, Michael Chinigo writes of General Mark Clark that he "usually arrived with an entourage including correspondents and photographers," that his public relations officer required all press dispatches to include the phrase "Lieut. Gen. Mark W. Clark's Fifth Army" and that "his concern for personal publicity was his greatest weakness." He may assuage that sting a little with some professional compliments, but these seem hardly strong enough to soften their eyes the next time these two meet.

Can't Agree

And as one of the public to whom Truscott submits his story for judgment of his own career, I would say that he has scored a resounding failure in a weak effort to redeem the horrible butchery at Dieppe where Lord Louis Mountbatten sent an expedition ashore so badly planned and organized that even today, Truscott, the British admiralty and other authorities who have tried to take Mountbatten off the hook can't agree even on the purposes, to say nothing of the "lessons" learned.

Truscott's other disaster, described as such by Winston Churchill, was Anzio, which he now tries to interpret as a victory on the ground that a lot of Germans were killed and seven German divisions were diverted from Russia, the Balkans and France.

We first encounter Mike Chinigo as a mysterious individual who had been seen wandering around the 7th infantry area in Sicily. Gen. Truscott had had no word from army headquarters regarding this character and didn't even know who he was.

"I sent the division provost marshal out to arrest him and bring him in for an accounting," the general tells me. "Then I had a surprise. Gen. Egan, assistant division commander, brought him in to me and introduced him. He was Michael Chinigo, International News Service

correspondent. He was properly accredited to the division but had not reported to division headquarters because he had wished to land with a combat unit and was afraid we would not permit it. He had therefore gone to the loading pier and had climbed on board an LCI, finding himself with Col. Sherman's 7th infantry.

"Eagles and Sherman both reported that Chinigo had landed with the Seventh under fire and had distinguished himself during the action on that beachhead and the advance inland. When the Seventh headquarters reached the railroad station a kilometer or so inland, the telephone was ringing. Chinigo, speaking perfect Italian, answered. Agents at some inland town had heard that the allies were landing, but Chinigo assured them that conditions in the area were entirely normal.

"Subsequently, Colonel Sherman recommended that Chinigo be awarded the silver star for his gallantry during this action. This was approved in Washington. Several months later I was to have the pleasure of pinning the decoration on him.

"Mike accompanied the Third Division thruout the Sicilian campaign. He was the first correspondent to enter both Palermo and Messina. His early dispatches, cleared at AFHQ, were a principal source of information as to the progress of the campaign during the early days of the landing. We became close friends. His intimate knowledge of Italians and Italy was to be invaluable to me."

At Anzio, during the breakout, General Truscott tipped Mike that if he wanted to be the first correspondent in Rome, he had better stick around. He did.

Several days later, General Truscott heard Mike's story. Knowing the city, he took his jeep out of the armored column to which he had attached himself and drove along a parallel street where he came upon a German column pulling out. Mike passed the word to the American column and raced on to the Hotel Excelsior where he signed the register "to show that Chinigo was there." Then he did the same at a number of other hotels.

The next morning he filed a piece and "so set off a rush for Rome," where, incidentally, some of the high New Dealers soon were to get rich black-marketing cigarettes, rations and soap.

Battle Exploit

This tribute to the dash and courage of a journalist who is widely known in Italy and among the Italian and American official set in Rome, but almost unknown to the

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American public, fails to deal with another battle exploit that was related to me by others in Rome two years ago.

Mike had gone along with a combat battalion in the advance out of the Salerno beach and was up forward when the outfit was caught in a rocky pass. The officers were out of action and the correspondent pulled the command together and led it across a bridge into a sheltered position.

Mike comes from New Haven, has a medical degree, speaks seven languages, including a couple of Balkan tongues, and he never slunk away from the war to come home to lecture, make moving pictures or ham it in battledress on the vaudeville stage. In fact, when the war ended he plunged right into the newspaper job in Rome. Barring a couple of brief visits home on office matters and personal affairs, he has been there ever since. He is not a military expert and even tho he knows hundreds of generals, prime ministers and ambassadors, I have sat far into many a night with him and never heard him drop a name.

He fought the Reds so hard and with such effect in Rome that for a time the government had police around his home around the clock and he has never had to go to the pains of explaining how he happened to lend his name to some Communist front for Spain or Russian relief because he never did.

One way and another Mike Chinigo is a real character. [Copyright, 1954, King Features Syndicate, Inc.]